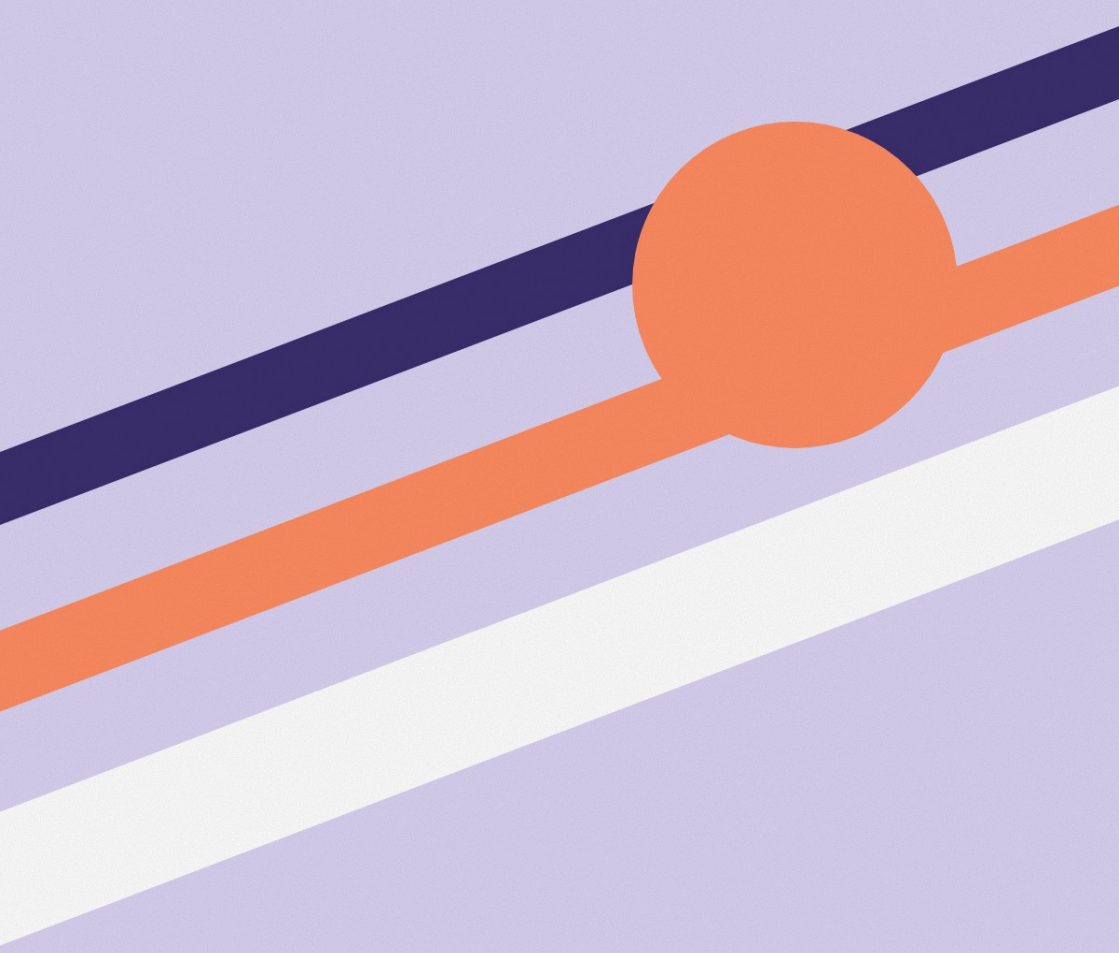


ON LIBERTY

JOHN STUART MILL

JVA EDITORA



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By

John Stuart Mill.

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With an Introduction by
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To the beloved and deplored memory of her who was the inspirer, and in part the author, of all that is best in my writings—the friend and wife whose exalted sense of truth and right was my strongest incitement, and whose approbation was my chief reward—I dedicate this volume. Like all that I have written for many years, it belongs as much to her as to me; but the work as it stands has had, in a very insufficient degree, the inestimable advantage of her revision; some of the most important portions having been reserved for a more careful re-examination, which they are now never destined to receive. Were I but capable of interpreting to the world one-half the great thoughts and noble feelings which are buried in her grave, I should be the medium of a greater benefit to it than is ever likely to arise from

anything that I can write, unprompted and unassisted by her all but unrivalled wisdom.

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INTRODUCTION.

I.

John Stuart Mill was born on 20th May 1806. He was a delicate child, and the extraordinary education designed by his father was not calculated to develop and improve his physical powers. "I never was a boy," he says; "never played cricket." His exercise was taken in the form of walks with his father, during which the elder Mill lectured his son and examined him on his work. It is idle to speculate on the possible results of a different treatment. Mill remained delicate throughout his life, but was endowed with that intense mental energy which is so often combined with physical weakness. His youth was sacrificed to an idea; he was designed by his father to carry on his work; the individuality of the boy was unimportant. A visit to the south of France at the age of fourteen, in company with the family of General Sir Samuel Bentham, was not without its influence. It was a glimpse of another atmosphere, though the studious habits of his home life were maintained. Moreover, he derived from it his interest in foreign politics, which remained one of his characteristics to the end of his life. In 1823 he was appointed junior clerk in the Examiners' Office at the India House.

Mill's first essays were written in the *Traveller* about a year before he entered the India House. From that time forward his literary work was uninterrupted save by attacks of illness. His industry was stupendous. He wrote articles on an infinite variety of subjects, political, metaphysical, philosophic, religious, poetical. He discovered Tennyson for his generation, he influenced the writing of Carlyle's *French Revolution* as well as its success. And all the

while he was engaged in studying and preparing for his more ambitious works, while he rose step by step at the India Office. His *Essays on Unsettled Questions in Political Economy* were written in 1831, although they did not appear until thirteen years later. His *System of Logic*, the design of which was even then fashioning itself in his brain, took thirteen years to complete, and was actually published before the *Political Economy*. In 1844 appeared the *Principles of Political Economy* on Michelet, which its author anticipated would cause some discussion, but which did not create the sensation he expected. Next year there were the "Claims of Labour" and "Guizot," and in 1847 his articles on Irish affairs in the *Morning Chronicle*. These years were very much influenced by his friendship and correspondence with Comte, a curious comradeship between men of such different temperament. In 1848 Mill published his *Political Economy*, to which he had given his serious study since the completion of his *Logic*. His articles and reviews, though they involved a good deal of work—as, for instance, the re-perusal of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in the original before reviewing Grote's *Greece*—were recreation to the student. The year 1856 saw him head of the Examiners' Office in the India House, and another two years brought the end of his official work, owing to the transfer of India to the Crown. In the same year his wife died. *Liberty* was published shortly after, as well as the *Thoughts on Parliamentary Reform*, and no year passed without Mill making important contributions on the political, philosophical, and ethical questions of the day.

Seven years after the death of his wife, Mill was invited to conduct the election at Westminister. His feeling on the conduct of elections made him refuse to take any personal action in the matter, and he gave the frankest expression to his political views, but nevertheless he was elected by a large majority. He was not a conventional success in

the House; as a speaker he lacked magnetism. But his influence was widely felt. "For the sake of the House of Commons at large," said Mr. Gladstone, "I rejoiced in his advent and deplored his disappearance. He did us all good." After only three years in Parliament, he was defeated at the next General Election by Mr. W. H. Smith. He retired to Avignon, to the pleasant little house where the happiest years of his life had been spent in the companionship of his wife, and continued his disinterested labours. He completed his edition of his father's *Analysis of the Mind*, and also produced, in addition to less important work, *The Subjection of Women*, in which he had the active co-operation of his step-daughter. A book on Socialism was under consideration, but, like an earlier study of Sociology, it never was written. He died in 1873, his last years being spent peacefully in the pleasant society of his step-daughter, [From] whose tender care and earnest intellectual sympathy he caught maybe a far-off reflection of the light which had irradiated his spiritual life.

II.

The circumstances under which John Stuart Mill wrote his *Liberty* are largely connected with the influence which Mrs. Taylor wielded over his career. The dedication is well known. It contains the most extraordinary panegyric on a woman that any philosopher has ever penned. "Were I but capable of interpreting to the world one-half the great thoughts and noble feelings which are buried in her grave, I should be the medium of a greater benefit to it than is ever likely to arise from anything that I can write, unprompted and unassisted by her all but unrivalled wisdom." It is easy for the ordinary worldly cynicism to curl a sceptical lip over sentences like these. There may be exaggeration of sentiment, the necessary and inevitable reaction of a man who was trained according to the "dry light" of so unimpressionable a man as James Mill, the father; but the passage quoted is not the only one in which John Stuart Mill proclaims his unhesitating belief in the intellectual influence of his wife. ~~The~~ ^{xiii} treatise on *Liberty* was written especially under her authority and encouragement, but there are many earlier references to the power which she exercised over his mind. Mill was introduced to her as early as 1831, at a dinner-party at Mr. Taylor's house, where were present, amongst others, Roebuck, W. J. Fox, and Miss Harriet Martineau. The acquaintance rapidly ripened into intimacy and the intimacy into friendship, and Mill was never weary of expatiating on all the advantages of so singular a relationship. In some of the presentation copies of his work on *Political Economy*, he wrote the following dedication:—"To Mrs. John Taylor, who, of all persons known to the author, is the most highly qualified either to originate or to appreciate speculation on social advancement, this work is

with the highest respect and esteem dedicated." An article on the enfranchisement of women was made the occasion for another encomium. We shall hardly be wrong in attributing a much later book, *The Subjection of Women*, published in 1869, to the influence wielded by Mrs. Taylor. Finally, the pages of the *Autobiography* ring with the dithyrambic praise of his "almost infallible counsellor."

The facts of this remarkable intimacy can easily be stated. ~~The~~ deductions are more difficult. There is no question that Mill's infatuation was the cause of considerable trouble to his acquaintances and friends. His father openly taxed him with being in love with another man's wife. Roebuck, Mrs. Grote, Mrs. Austin, Miss Harriet Martineau were amongst those who suffered because they made some allusion to a forbidden subject. Mrs. Taylor lived with her daughter in a lodging in the country; but in 1851 her husband died, and then Mill made her his wife. Opinions were widely divergent as to her merits; but every one agreed that up to the time of her death, in 1858, Mill was wholly lost to his friends. George Mill, one of Mill's younger brothers, gave it as his opinion that she was a clever and remarkable woman, but "nothing like what John took her to be." Carlyle, in his reminiscences, described her with ambiguous epithets. She was "vivid," "iridescent," "pale and passionate and sad-looking, a living-romance heroine of the royalist volition and questionable destiny." It is not possible to make much of a judgment like this, but we get on more certain ground when we discover that Mrs. Carlyle said on one occasion that "she is thought to be dangerous," and that Carlyle added that she was worse than dangerous, she was patronising. The occasion when Mill and his wife were brought into close contact with the Carlyles is well known. The manuscript of the first volume of the *French Revolution* had been lent to Mill, and was accidentally burnt by Mrs. Mill's

servant. Mill and his wife drove up to Carlyle's door, the wife speechless, the husband so full of conversation that he detained Carlyle with desperate attempts at loquacity for two hours. But Dr. Garnett tells us, in his *Life of Carlyle*, that Mill made a substantial reparation for the calamity for which he was responsible by inducing the aggrieved author to accept half of the £200 which he offered. Mrs. Mill, as I have said, died in 1858, after seven years of happy companionship with her husband, and was buried at Avignon. The inscription which Mill wrote for her grave is too characteristic to be omitted:—"Her great and loving heart, her noble soul, her clear, powerful, original, and comprehensive intellect, made her the guide and support, the instructor in wisdom and the example in goodness, as she was the sole earthly delight of those who had the happiness to belong to her. As earnest for all public good as she was generous and devoted to all who surrounded her, her influence has been felt in many of the greatest improvements of the age, and will be in those still to come. Were there even a few hearts and intellects like hers, this earth would already become the hoped-for Heaven." These lines prove the intensity of Mill's feeling, which is not afraid of abundant verbiage; but they also prove that he could not imagine what the effect would be on others, and, as Grote said, only Mill's reputation could survive these and similar displays.

Every one will judge for himself of this romantic episode in Mill's career, according to such experience as he may possess of the philosophic mind and of the value of these curious but not infrequent relationships. It may have been a piece of infatuation, or, if we prefer to say so, it may have been the most gracious and the most human page in Mill's career. Mrs. Mill may have flattered her husband's vanity by echoing his opinions, or she may have indeed been an Egeria, full of inspiration and intellectual helpfulness. What